Executive Summary

Wisconsin's Educational Collaboration for Youth in Foster Care project seeks to use data to improve educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care (OHC). The project is focused on identifying and overcoming the barriers between public schools and child welfare services that hinder the information exchange necessary to improve the educational outcomes for youth in foster care. The short term goal is to build an infrastructure that will lay the groundwork to track trends in child, school, district, and state-level outcomes, as well as future causal inference research. The long term goal is to systematize access to, and improve the quality of, educational data about children in out-of-home care to better understand and specifically target educational needs, leading to improved educational outcomes for youth in out-of-home care.

Introduction and Overview

Objectives

The goal of the project is to promote educational success for children and youth in the child welfare system by targeting the following three objectives:
1. Increase strategic coordination and communication between the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) by building on state-level data sharing agreements and linking state-level data on an ongoing basis.
2. Increase strategic coordination and communication between county child welfare workers and schools by developing a local-level data sharing portal.
3. Support the development of policies, procedures, and practices to increase the identification, enrollment, and attendance of targeted youths in care into comprehensive, high-quality education services and multi-disciplinary interventions that increase protective factors and decrease risk factors to improve outcomes for youths in foster care.

Lead Agency

DCF was the lead agency that developed, implemented and managed Wisconsin's efforts in this grant. DCF is a cabinet-level agency responsible for child welfare, community-based juvenile justice services, child care, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child support, child abuse/neglect prevention, and domestic violence programs. The team was led by John Elliott, Deputy Administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence.

DCF worked in collaboration with DPI, the state education agency, and piloted the local level data sharing portal with Dane County and the Madison Metropolitan School District (see Collaborations). UW-Madison's Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) conducted research on the educational outcomes of students in out-of-home care, with the goal of identifying policy leverage points for child welfare and school practice.

Demographic Characteristics

In April 2012, DCF and DPI implemented a pilot data sharing exercise, matching child welfare eWiSACWIS data with SLDS educational data for a cohort of over 1,300 children ages 7 to 18 that entered out-of-home care in 2008. The pilot yielded a 93% data match rate and provided the State with its first descriptive look at educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

Preliminary analysis of the data suggests cause for concern regarding the educational progress of Wisconsin's school-age children in out-of-home care. Children in the Wisconsin sample experienced high rates of school mobility. For example, 44% of children reported at least one school move during the 2008-09 school year, and 9% (122 children) attended three or more schools. A high percentage of these children also reported attending school in more than one district in a single year.

Further data analysis showed the greater struggles experienced by youth in OHC. For example, in the 2008-09 school year, 5.6% of out-of-home care students in the sample were retained, compared to the statewide retention average of 1.6%. Approximately 16% of the children in the sample had been retained at least once up to and including in that year. End-of-year exit data indicated that 19 children were school drop-outs.

The average attendance rate for children in out-of-home care was 84.6%, 10 percentage points less than the average attendance rate for children statewide. Children in the sample also demonstrated high levels of special needs. Approximately 43% were classified as having a disability, and, of those children, 47% indicated a primary disability of emotional or behavioral disorder. Furthermore, children in out-of-home care were 15 times more likely to be expelled and 6 times more likely to be suspended than the general student population.

Although the data includes information across children of all grade levels, the majority of children in the sample (over 1,000) were in grades 6 through 12, suggesting high levels of adverse education outcomes for the state's older out-of-home care population. Of particular concern is the fact that retention and attendance, which are significantly worse for out-of-home care children, are powerful predictors of whether students will complete high school (Heppen & Therriault, 2008).

Project Goal

Wisconsin strives to expand its efforts to build infrastructure capacity to ensure that children in out-of-home care are afforded the ability to succeed and thrive in education settings; and, thus, to improve permanency outcomes and their eventual adult employment and lifestyle outcomes.

Collaborations

Department of Public Instruction

The partnership between DCF and DPI was strengthened through the work of this grant. Specifically, the two agencies have established formal data sharing policies and protocols, developed a research bridge that will continue to increase analytical capacity, and collaborated on communicating findings and developing plans to address identified challenges. Specifics are outlined in the Program Model section.

Dane County Department of Human Services (DCDHS) - Division of Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) and Madison Metropolitan School District

DCF worked with Dane County Department of Human Services (DCDHS) and the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) to develop the local-level data sharing portal. Dane County is home to the state's second largest out-of-home care population. MMSD is the second largest school district in Wisconsin, serving 26,817 students and is an example of an innovative and high achieving urban school district outperforming the state average in Wisconsin in a number of key areas.

DCF identified the information to be shared between schools and county child welfare agencies and established data sharing policies, protocols, and joint guidance, in compliance with FERPA and other state and federal privacy laws. DCF and DPI worked with a developer to build and pilot the portal and are in the process of developing a statewide expansion plan. Specifics are outlined in the Program Model section.

Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP)

DCF has a long standing collaborative relationship with the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Institute for Research on Poverty and School of Social Work. IRP has a unique merged administrative data system, known as the Multi-Sample Person File (MSPF). It combines data across governmental agencies including DPI and DCF. Specifics are outlined in the Program Model section and the Evaluation sections.

Overview of Program Model

The goals of the project are to (1) build cross-system data infrastructure for information sharing, (2) develop a local level data sharing portal, and (3) support the development of policies, procedures and practices that increase the identification, enrollment and support of children at risk of poor educational outcomes by promoting awareness of culturally appropriate, evidence-based, trauma-informed, multi-disciplinary approaches for identified youth. The activities and interventions completed during the grant period are detailed below, in addition to a description of pertinent collaborations/partnerships. Logic model is attached to the report.

Build Cross-System Data Infrastructure for Information Sharing

Establish formal data sharing policies and protocols and MOUS to guide work, specifically:
- Completed a data sharing agreement and established protocols for an exchange among DCF, Madison Metropolitan School District, and Dane County Human Services Department. The data sharing agreement will be modified to serve as a model MOU for other county child welfare agencies and school districts to use throughout the state. The data sharing agreement allows for a district-wide data sharing policy for caseworkers to access both electronic and paper records.

Ensure information collected is consistent with FERPA
- Codifying Uninterrupted Scholars Act (USA) into Wisconsin state law through <u>Assembly Bill 478</u> and <u>Senate Bill 353</u>. Like the federal USA, these state bills permit educational records to be disclosed to a caseworker or other representative of an agency or tribal organization that has the right to access a student's case plan. The state bills have passed both houses of the legislature and the governor is expected to sign the bill into law. DCF and DPI will work on a joint roll out plan to provide model MOUs and expand the portal usage to additional school districts.
- Created an Education Passport form. DCF designed a new page in eWiSACWIS to collect information for the purpose of generating an Education Passport form. A need was identified by DCF to create an Education Passport form that can be completed within eWiSACWIS and then provided to the school alerting school officials of a foster child's enrollment into or disenrollment out of a school, in addition to other pertinent information including general education information, child welfare contact information, out of home care provider information, parent/guardian/custodian information, and information for school staff to promote school success.
- Completed a desk guide for caseworkers related to information sharing. The desk guide is intended to be a resource to assist child welfare staff in collaborating with schools. It includes a school enrollment checklist, federal and state laws (i.e. FERPA) regarding information sharing between child welfare and educational agencies, information on the Education Passport, best practices, and links to national resources.

Identify research questions and develop a shared research agenda for DPI and DCF

- DCF contracted with the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) to conduct research analyzing characteristics of foster care placements and educational needs and outcomes. DCF continues to work with DPI and IRP to deepen our understanding of the educational performance of youth in out of home care.

Increase analytical capacity through further analysis of initial and future data matches

- Renewing a master data sharing agreement with DPI to accommodate interdepartmental research agendas. For example, DPI is currently examining the research question: how many students who don't graduate high school have had an OHC placement, and how many of these students moved while in high school?
- Working with a LaFollette School of Public Affairs graduate student team to analyze data on education outcomes for students in out-of-home care, specifically graduation rates by county and placement type.

Local Data Sharing Pilot Project

A prototype caseworker portal that uses existing data in the Madison schools data infrastructure was completed in February 2015. The portal is intended to provide caseworkers access to student's school attendance, academic progress and behavior reports directly and in real-time.

eWiSACWIS functional and technical staff, representatives from DPI, DCF, MMSD, and DCDHS met four times during the summer of 2015 for Design and Review sessions in Madison, Wisconsin. The group evaluated the requirements and discussed the features that would need to be added or enhanced in eWiSACWIS, DPI and DCDHS systems to accommodate the new functionalities.

In August 2015, a design was completed to enhance the eWiSACWIS - DPI interface to receive school district codes and Wisconsin Student Numbers (WSNs) of certain students, while enabling certain Dane County users to access these children's education records located at the MMSD portal in order to promote and encourage child welfare social workers' involvement in the children's education plan.

Quality assurance (QA) testing was completed on the enhancement and will be rolled out with the eWiSACWIS release in February 2016. By spring 2016, DCF and DPI plan to identify additional school districts to rollout the same portal system used in Madison, marking the beginning of a staged, incremental rollout of the portal statewide.

Support the development of policies, procedures and practices that increase the identification, enrollment and support of children at risk of poor educational outcomes by promoting awareness of culturally appropriate, evidence-based, trauma-informed, multi-disciplinary approaches for identified youth

Education Tools for Caseworkers

The caseworker desk guide and Education Passport form described above are two tools that are available for child welfare staff to increase the practice of information sharing between child welfare agencies and schools.

Online Training

The <u>online training</u> titled "Passports to Success: Assuring Positive Educational Experiences for Children in Out-of-Home Care," is now accessible to school staff statewide. The training focuses on the needs and actions school staff should consider when supporting youth in out-of-home care. The training contains seven modules: Children in Out-of-Home Care, the Child Welfare System, Communication between Systems, Trauma, Behavior Management, Educational Stability, and Transitioning to Adulthood.

DCF/DPI Collaboration Meetings

A DCF/DPI interagency working group met on a quarterly basis, and will continue to meet to advance current projects from this grant, and to continue work on other policy and program initiatives that may arise related to improving educational outcomes for children in OHC. For example, we will work together on implementing provisions from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorization, which contains key protections for students in foster care to promote school stability and success, and required collaboration with child welfare partners. The interagency group is also exploring possible linkages with the DCF trauma project and DPI projects at the district- and school- levels.

Project Implementation/Process Evaluation

Increase strategic coordination and communication between DCF and DPI by building on initial state-level data sharing agreements, including ensuring that all information sharing is consistent with FERPA and applicable state and federal privacy regulations.

Increased Strategic Coordination between DCF and DPI

DCF and DPI exchanged data on the annual outcomes of children in out-of-home-care over the last several school years. In concert with IRP, DPI and DCF are working to establish the appropriate comparison group for children in out-of-home-care on an ongoing basis and are exploring looking at economically disadvantaged children, screened-in cases, or historical results of children in out-of-home-care as benchmarks. Outcome measures of interest currently include attendance, assessment scores, and graduation rates. In addition, work is continuing to explore the utility of using DPI's Dropout Early Warning System risk score system for students in grades 6-9.

DCF and DPI were unable to coordinate one state-level data sharing agreement during the life of the grant due to unforeseen changes in educational vendor software adoption practices across the state. We adapted to work with specific school districts, and increased strategic coordination and communication between DCF and DPI was prioritized. A specific data sharing agreement between an individual county health department, a large school district, DPI, and DCF was a challenge that focused our evaluation team on training needs across all organizations working towards assuring positive educational experiences for children in out-of-home care. This local data sharing agreement did ensure that all information sharing was consistent with FERPA and applicable state and federal privacy regulations. The time and staff resources devoted to its completion did carry considerable opportunity costs.

Develop a local-level data sharing portal; and an early warning system for children facing educational challenges.

A prototype caseworker portal that uses existing data in the Madison schools data infrastructure was completed in February 2015. The portal is intended to provide caseworkers access to student's school attendance, academic progress and behavior reports directly and in real-time.

The largest challenge for this activity was in completing a data sharing agreement. The prototype portal was tested in one Madison High School, but the completion of the signed data sharing agreement occurred too late in the grant cycle to evaluate barriers to the use and adoption of this tool.

Support developing policies, procedures, and practices to increase the identification, enrollment, and attendance of targeted youths in care into education services and multi-disciplinary interventions.

Caseworker Desk Guide
An informational memo to counties was published in September 2015, notifying agencies about the availability of the desk guide and Education Passport. The caseworker desk guide was completed and released to all 72 Wisconsin counties.

Education Passport
In the fall of 2014, DCF designed a new page in eWiSACWIS to collect information for the purpose of generating an Education Passport form. The Education Passport became functional in eWiSACWIS in June 2015. DCF is working on a robust rollout plan of this form, having piloted it for several months.

Education Tool Kit
The education tool kit is housed on the Office of Youth Services website. It includes grant deliverables, including the model MOU, a guide to the Education Passport form, the caseworker desk guide, links to Department of Public Instruction (DPI) resources for at-risk students, research findings from the Institute for Research on Poverty, and tools that will aid information sharing between child welfare and school staff. This toolkit has undergone slight revisions during the review period. Additional details may be found at:
http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/memos/infomemos/DSP/2015/2015-14.pdf

Pilot online training curriculum

Online training development
The evaluation survey for the training titled "Passports to Success: Assuring Positive Educational Experiences for Children in Out-of-Home Care," was sent to 1,679 K-12 principals throughout Wisconsin. However, only 2 school staff completed the training and evaluation survey. We are therefore unable to provide data on the evaluation of the training. Additional analyses are required to determine barriers to completion of the training. We continue to monitor traffic to the Passports to Success training: http://wcwpds.wisc.edu/passports/.

Project Outcome Evaluation

Short Term Outcomes

- State and local data sharing processes are compliant with FERPA and with other state and federal privacy laws
- Improvement in system functioning between DPI, DCF, and the Court System
- Better collaboration between local school districts and child welfare
- Increased data collection and analytical capacity of DPI and DCF
- Use of data-driven decision making
- Increased awareness of unique needs of foster children
- Research based, trauma-informed tools are more accessible to assist key stakeholders and foster families use data and access resources

Although many of these specific goals listed in the initial grant are hard to quantify, the expected short term outcomes were achieved in specific local jurisdictions where work was conducted. Besides the state-wide data sharing agreement, the activities of this grant focused mostly on Dane County and the Madison Metropolitan School District. The major focus of our work was increasing the data collection and analytical capacity of DPI and DCF while fostering better collaboration between local school districts and child welfare. The completed data sharing agreement required positive outcomes from all of these short term outcomes.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Creation of dashboards for districts that can be used to identify high and low achieving schools with respect to educational performance of children in out of home care
- Identification of common issues that affect foster children requiring targeted interventions
- Creation of evidence-based early warning system

The identification of common issues that affect foster children was addressed by the Institute for Research and Policy using DPI and DCF administrative data. Overall, the analyses suggest that, whereas out-of-home placements do not appear to have a particular influence on academic achievement, it may more directly influence other educational outcomes (grade retention, disciplinary actions, high school completion) that are more closely associated with social-emotional rather than cognitive development.

Long Term Outcomes

- Improved stability/permanency for children in foster care
- Improved educational outcomes
- Children engage in evidence-based practices to improve social-emotional outcomes, educational outcomes, and stability
- Improved post-secondary outcomes for middle and high school youth.

The changes in educational vendor software platforms across the state required a shift towards working with one individual school district and child welfare agency. As this process took the majority of the grant cycle most of the Intermediate and all of the Long Term outcomes have not yet

been evaluated. As the collaboration between DCF and DPI grows these outcomes will be a strategic focus going forward.

Conclusions

This project has considerably increased strategic coordination and communication between the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Public Instruction. Both departments are committed to a joint research agenda and to understanding and improving educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

This project also significantly increased the communication between Dane County Health and Human Services and the Madison Metropolitan School District. This collaboration provides best practice and data sharing templates that other county child welfare agencies can use.

Due to the considerable length of time it took to get all parties to sign the initial data sharing agreement, it is too early to determine the long term outcomes of this work on the identification, enrollment, and attendance of targeted youths in care into comprehensive, high-quality education services and multi-disciplinary interventions that improve the educational experiences of youth in out-of-home placements.

Implications of Results and Recommendations

Recommendations to administrators of future, similar projects

Developing trust between agencies is essential for collaboration and data sharing, especially where sensitive data is involved. The iterative nature of this project allowed the state and local processes to start with smaller data sharing projects and evolve into larger ones. This is a useful approach when beginning a collaboration.

Recommendations to project funders

Funding is needed to strengthen infrastructure and training around data sharing in complex systems. Through this project it became evident that data sharing between child welfare and schools is especially needed in order to improve educational outcomes for children in OHC. Given the complicated nature of data sharing in these areas, increased funding would help data sharing projects, similar to DCF and DPI's local data sharing portal, get off the ground.

Recommendations to the general field

Pinpointing the differences between performances for youth in OHC as compared with all youth, but in particular comparison with similarly situated low income children, creates a more nuanced view of the disparate outcomes and potential interventions. For example, it is important when looking at school mobility to understand that children in OHC are often highly mobile prior to entering OHC.

Draft Logic Model: *Child Welfare-Education System Collaborations to Increase Educational Stability*

Situation: Wisconsin has already initiated a pilot effort to begin connecting data between the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Public Instruction with the goal of better understanding unique educational outcomes of children in foster care. Interventions that increase school and child placement stability could be identified/supported. Grant offers opportunity to strengthen this work, develop state and local policies and targeted intervention(s) based on data analysis.

Inputs	Outputs — Activities	Outputs — Participation	Outcomes – Impact — Short	Outcomes – Impact — Medium	Outcomes – Impact — Long
County Child Welfare Staff	Data sharing and analysis	DPI	Improvement in system functioning between DPI, DCF and the Court System	School stability is improved.	Improved permanency for children in foster care.
DPI, DCF Staff	Develop data sharing protocols, policies and agreements at the state level (between DCF and DPI), and	DCF		Creation of dash boards for districts that can be used to identify high and low achieving schools when it comes to educational performance of children in out of home care.	Improved educational outcomes for children in out of home care.
Existing Data Resources – DPI WINS system	At the local level between School Districts and county Child Welfare agencies	Courts	Improvements in collaboration between local school districts and child welfare agencies/social workers		
DPI, P-20 LDC	Develop "tool box" for how to use data to improve education outcomes, including promoting permanency for districts, social workers, court personnel, parents and birth parents including judicial check-list	County Child Welfare agencies and Social workers			
EC-LDS		Children in out of home care	Increased data collection and analytical capacity of DPI and DCF	Identification of common issues that affect foster children requiring targeted interventions	
WI SACWIS	Link and provide access to Trauma-informed tool –kit , RTI (DPI)		Use of data-driven decision making		
IRP work at DCF around data sharing	Ensure tool box includes existing tools such as Judicial checklist, maybe some of the McKinney Vento resources	Birth parents			
Courts	Develop targeted intervention based on learning from research project	Foster Parents	Increased awareness of unique needs of foster children		
	Cross-department and CW/School training and awareness	Human service agency programs	Trauma informed tools available to assist key stakeholders and foster families use data, access resources		
	School liaisons	Family service programs			
	Multi-disciplinary teams	Other stakeholders	Children engaged in evidence-based practices to improve social emotional outcomes; educational outcomes and stability		
	Pilot Endless Dreams				
	Cross-department collaborative workgroup				

Assumptions

Having good data will help us improve the understanding of out of home care population and help us to better support improved educational outcomes for children.

Foster children generally have poorer outcomes than children not in out of home care.

Transition from middle school to high school is a critical time in child/educational development.

External Factors

Supporting forces: DPI in the beginning of SIS build up over five years that will provide statewide, real time data about a range of student educational outcomes.
Endless Dreams pilot
Milwaukee Pilot Project (IDEAS), work in Milwaukee with MPS around data sharing; potentially scale up Milwaukee Pilot?
Constraining forces: County budget constraints, State run BMCW/county run

04/20/12